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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 006505

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#) [COUNTERTERRORISM](#) [GOI](#) [EXTERNAL](#) [ISRAELI](#) [PALESTINIAN](#) [AFFAIRS](#)

SUBJECT: "THE BATTLE FOR HEARTS AND MINDS"

Classified By: Pol/C Norm Olsen for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Brigadier General Yossi Kuperwasser told CODEL Talent December 6 that the war on terrorism must be waged across no less than five fronts: the physical battle; the efforts of society itself to endure in the face of continued attacks; society's need to remain true to its values rather than resorting to unsavory tactics in order to win; maintaining legitimacy of your country's actions in your own eyes, in those of the population, and among the international community; and finally to "maintain the legitimacy of the narrative," something the United States did not initially do well in Iraq. Calling it a battle for the hearts and minds of the Muslim world, Kuperwasser said that it is more important to win over the five million potential al-Qaeda supporters than it is to try and convert the 15,000 actual ones. Kuperwasser welcomed Palestinian elections, saying that the multiple candidates, in particular Marwan Barghouti, would provide the Palestinians with a clear choice -- moving forward to reform with Abu Mazen, or stagnating further by supporting the Intifada with Barghouti. End Summary.

12. (SBU) Brigadier General Yossi Kuperwasser, chief of the Research Division at IDF Military Intelligence, met with Senator James Talent, Military Legislative Assistant Lindsey Neas, Legislative Fellow Lore Aguayo, and Navy Senate Liaison Deputy Director CAPT. James Stein (USN) on December 6. A/Air Attache and Poloff (notetaker) accompanied.

Politics Over Religion

13. (C) BG Yossi Kuperwasser, chief of the Research Division, IDF Military Intelligence, told CODEL Talent December 6 that terrorism emanating from Palestinian extremists is not so much a matter of religion as it is one of maintaining Arab pride. Palestinian youth are taught that no sacrifice is too great, even to the point of giving one's life as a suicide bomber. In response to the Senator's question, Kuperwasser agreed that religion plays a role as a tool, but maintained his point, using the latest suicide bombing (at the Carmel Market in Tel Aviv in November 2004) as an example: the PFLP, which claimed responsibility for the attack, are a Marxist organization, he said, not a religious one. Groups such as these offer the would-be bombers the chance to be a heroes, Kuperwasser said, something that appeals to "certain weak people."

"It is a Battle for Hearts and Minds"

14. (C) The most limiting factor in carrying out a suicide attack is not recruiting the bomber, according to Kuperwasser, but manufacturing the explosive device. Warning to his subject, Kuperwasser said the problem is not to convince, for example, the 15,000 al-Qaeda militants to become pro-American, but rather to convince their five million possible supporters to choose not to support al-Qaeda. The Senator agreed, saying it is essential to address the underlying causes of terrorism in order to fight it effectively. The battle is one "for hearts and minds," Kuperwasser said.

15. (C) Kuperwasser called the ongoing war against terror one of words and concepts, adding that the Arab world does not acknowledge terrorism as such, in particular on media outlets such al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya. Regimes, Kuperwasser said, are not really relevant when it is media that is inside a person's home and shaping that individual's view of the world. Palestinian presidential elections are extremely important, Kuperwasser said, as they have great legitimacy on the Palestinian street and will thus be an important step forward in conferring more legitimacy on the new crop of Palestinian leaders. Kuperwasser contrasted this legitimacy with what he described as "much less" legitimacy among Iraqis for January elections in that country.

Barghouti's Candidacy is a Good Thing

16. (C) Kuperwasser professed to be unhappy that the

Palestinians could not, as a society, move ahead with elections until after Arafat had left the scene from natural causes. That being said, the elections themselves are the most important thing, and the GOI fully intends to provide the Palestinians with "everything they had in 1996," to assist in successfully holding them -- including resolution of the Jerusalem voter issue -- to leave no excuse to blame Israel or subsequent failures of Palestinian governance. The election of convicted terrorist Marwan Barghouti over moderate pragmatist Abu Mazen would leave no doubt in anyone's mind as to the direction in which Palestinian society was headed, Kuperwasser said. (Note: Barghouti subsequently withdrew from the race. End Note).

A Five-Front War

17. (C) Kuperwasser said that the U.S. is already fighting the physical war against terrorism, and has shown the seriousness of its intent by actions in Afghanistan and Iraq. Kuperwasser said that there are four other fronts on which a country needs to fight if it intends to win. For example, the IDF has killed several thousand terrorists in the West Bank and yet there are always some 200-300 terrorists active at any one time. Thus society's endurance in light of these unrelenting attacks is the second essential factor, Kuperwasser said. Senator Talent agreed, saying that the Israeli public must believe that Israel is winning the war against terrorism and the Palestinians must come to believe that their tactics are ineffective. The goal is to change the Palestinians' expectations, Kuperwasser said, and the exchange of letters between PM Sharon and President Bush helped to achieve a fundamental alteration in the Palestinians' mindset.

18. (C) The third essential element or "front," according to Kuperwasser, is the extent to which a society remains loyal to its values. Step away from those, Kuperwasser warned, and popular support and legitimacy will be lost. The IDF's cooperation with Shin Bet, for example, is about trying to "conventionalize" this war, in the hopes of preventing civilian casualties when possible. The IDF uses Shin Bet intelligence in order to make pinpoint strikes against, for example, Qassam rocket launchers. All of Israel's national defense assets, Kuperwasser said, are available to the brigade-level commander, at last providing him with real-time ability to respond to threats while limiting civilian casualties. Kuperwasser contrasted these efforts with the recent killing of a 13-year-old girl in Rafah by IDF soldiers, the tragedy of which, he said, is compounded by the fact that the commander of the unit involved is accused of firing excessive shots into the girl's body. (NOTE: Currently under investigation. End Note). "We deviated from our values," Kuperwasser said, calling the affair "more damaging (to Israel) than a suicide bomber."

19. (C) Kuperwasser said that the fourth front to maintain is the legitimacy of your actions, in your own eyes and the eyes of the international community, and the legitimacy of your leadership. Calling President Bush's re-election the "legitimization of the (policies of the) past four years," Kuperwasser said that a leader's stature is exceptionally important in the Middle East context. Finally, Kuperwasser listed what he called the "legitimacy of the narrative," as the fifth and final front upon which the comprehensive war against terrorism must be waged. The United States, in Kuperwasser's view, did not have such a narrative in the run-up to the Iraq war, instead shifting several times its main rationale for overthrowing Saddam Hussein. Kuperwasser agreed with Senator Talent's assessment that action in Iraq had been to demonstrate that American values are available to the entire world and not just the West, but Kuperwasser maintained that too much time was spent trying find other justifications for the invasion, such as the search for WMD.

"Our Experience Might Not Work For You"

110. (C) On GOI counter-terrorism efforts, Kuperwasser said that his department and the IDF overall have "great relations" with their U.S. counterparts, sharing both methods and experience in the fight against terrorism. Kuperwasser stressed, however, that the culture among U.S. intelligence agencies is vastly different from that in Israel, where Kuperwasser said that military intelligence and Shin Bet are "hand in glove," despite disagreements and different overall strategic missions. Shin Bet is tasked directly with fighting terror; military intelligence also fights terror, but looks at the wider regional threat, and develops the National Intelligence Assessment.

111. (U) CODEL Talent cleared this cable.

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